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FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD, INR JYAPHE, AND GTIP RYOUSEY

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TAGS: [MCAP](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KTIP](#) [YM](#)
SUBJECT: MORE EVIDENCE THAT CHILD SOLDIERS USED BY "ALL
THREE" PARTIES IN SA'ADA WAR

REF: A. SANAA 1963
[1](#)B. SANAA 1936

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Credible NGO and media sources report that all three parties in the Sa'ada conflict -- the ROYG, the tribes, and the Houthis -- are using child soldiers. While the ROYG denies it uses child soldiers, local and international journalists and NGOs report that they interviewed child soldiers in Hajja and Amran governorates who trained at ROYG military camps and were involved in combat in Sa'ada. With mounting evidence that the ROYG -- in addition to the Houthis and the "popular army" of tribal fighters -- is using child soldiers, Post will raise concerns with ROYG officials and inform them that U.S. military assistance may be suspended if these allegations are substantiated. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Christoph Wilcke, a researcher for Human Rights Watch (HRW), told PolOffs on October 26 that "all three parties" in the Sa'ada conflict use child soldiers: the government, the tribes, and the Houthis. He said that during a recent trip to Hajja governorate, he spoke with one current and one former ROYG soldier who were under the age of 18. The former soldier, now an IDP, said that he trained for two months at a military camp in an area known as Minzalah, southwest of Malaheet (Sa'ada governorate). The other boy, who said he was born in 1994, told Wilcke that he was on leave from the army in order to escort his family to a safer area, but that he was planning to return to the army's Malaheet camp to rejoin the fight. (Note: Based on these and other cases it documented, HRW will be sending the ROYG a letter raising concerns about the use of child soldiers and other violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in the war in Sa'ada. End Note.) Ahmed al-Haj, AP's Yemen correspondent, agreed that all three parties are using child soldiers. He told PolOff on October 28 that during a trip to an area of Harf Sufyan (Amran governorate) controlled by the ROYG, he saw uniformed boys under the age of 18 who were in the ROYG army and had been engaged in combat. Haj said some soldiers were "even younger" than 15 and the ROYG is looking to recruit so many new soldiers so quickly, it turns a blind eye to those who are under the legal age. Many of the new recruits, including those who may be underage, are immediately sent to the front lines with little or no training. Naseem ur-Rehman, UNICEF's Chief of Communication and Advocacy, told PolOff on November 1 that what is striking about the IDP camp in Haradh (Hajja governorate) is the absence of boys over the age of ten; the vast majority of the camp population consists of women, young children, and old men. He presumes the "missing" boys are involved in the fighting. Rehman said that the ROYG is able to take advantage of the lack of birth registration to enroll underage soldiers in its ranks.

¶3. (C) The government continues to deny that it uses child soldiers. In his October 26 meeting with President Saleh (ref a), Ambassador Seche expressed concern about reports that child soldiers are fighting in Sa'ada. Saleh assured the Ambassador that only adults 18 and older are in the military, but said that the Houthis do use child soldiers. The Directorate of Military Intelligence informed the DATT on October 7 that the minimum age for joining the Yemeni military is 18. Yemen is also a party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which sets 18 as the minimum age for direct participation in hostilities.

¶4. (C) COMMENT. Evidence is mounting that the ROYG is using child soldiers in the Sa'ada war in violation of Yemeni and international law. Using child soldiers, and rushing them to combat without training, would suggest a level of military desperation by the ROYG that belies official statements that the conflict will end soon. Post will continue to raise concerns about the use of child soldiers with ROYG officials, informing them that IMET, FMF, EDA, section 1206, and licenses for commercial sales of military equipment can be suspended if these allegations are substantiated. END COMMENT.
SECHE